DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 828 FL 015 673

AUTHOR O Meadhra, Bebhinn
TITLE Panel Discussion of Questions Submitted by Participants in the Convention [On New Approaches in the Language Classroom: Coping with Change].
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 8p.; In: New Approaches in the Language Classroom: Coping with Change. Proceedings of the National Modern Languages Convention (2nd, Dublin, Ireland, January 31-February 1, 1986); see FL 015 669.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audiovisual Aids; *Classroom Techniques; Cloze Procedure; Foreign Countries; *Inservice Teacher Education; Instructional Improvement; *Language Tests; *Literature Appreciation; *Multilevel Classes (Second Language Instruction); Second Language Instruction; Standardized Tests; Test Reliability; Test Validity
IDENTIFIERS Ireland

ABSTRACT

A panel of classroom teachers and a Department of Education inspector respond to questions from participants in a conference on methodological advances in modern language teaching held in Ireland. The questions and answers address the following topics: (1) the usefulness and selection of cloze tests; (2) maintenance of high written language standards while achieving the objectives of the communicative approach; (3) integration of literature into coursework; (4) combatting passivity promoted by video- and tape-recorded materials; (5) coping with mixed-ability students in an upper-level class; (6) plans for inservice education in the use of new methods and materials; (7) developing new skills and transferring old skills to new teaching methods; and (8) the capacity of new methods to satisfy the educational needs of less able students. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED268828

PANEL DISCUSSION OF QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONVENTION

Edited by Bebhinn O Meadhra

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

O.G Little

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

FL 015 673

PANEL DISCUSSION OF QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONVENTION

Edited by Bebhinn O Meadhra

The panel was made up of practising teachers and a Department of Education inspector, who between them represented all four languages and a variety of approaches:

Helen Stillman (Chair)
Anne Clark
Natucca Cordon
Helen Harnett
Bill Richardson
Mary Varilly

QUESTION 1

"I question the validity of cloze tests. Often the material is so difficult that I wonder what they test! One can be a grammar expert and yet not know what to put in the blanks. I suggest instead either translation into the target language or a straightforward grammar section."

MARY VARILLY:

Cloze tests may not be ideal, but they are going to figur in the exams for a number of years and so we should address ourselves to finding successful ways of using them.

Cloze tests are language awareness tests: one's assessmer of what structural or lexical items are missing is based primarily on one's perception of the contextual meaning while at the same time paying attention to clues in the text, e.g. the gender or number of associated words. Because it draws on overall skills, a cloze test is not necessarily best prepared for by doing cloze tests, but rather by the development of awareness of the target langua and by the acquisition of a good vocabulary and a good knowledge of structure, all of which may perhaps best be done by reading.

From a test deviser's point of view, the emphasis in choosing a test passage should be not so much on the question of difficulty of wording as on accessibility of meaning. A passage should be picked to which students can relate - it makes sense to provide passages which are to a certain extent topical. For this reason too, reading would be a major element of classroom preparation, with some work on looking out for grammatical clues and indicators.

QUESTION 2

"How does the panel suggest that teachers help their students maintain a high level of proficiency in the written language as required, for example, by the matriculation exam, and at the same time achieve the objectives of the more recent communicative approach with its oral and written content as in the new Leaving Certificate exam?"

HELEN HARNETT:

Most teachers would agree that it is extremely unfair that students should be examined in writing in two totally different ways as they are at present in the NUI matriculation exam and the Leaving Certificate. The matriculation exam tests translation into and from the target language, tasks no longer included in the Leaving Certificate exams. This causes problems for students and for teachers. The FTA has complained about this to the NUI modern language professors, but as yet no change has been forthcoming.

Then we come to the eternal problem of written accuracy. It is not because of the new syllabus that we have problems in the written language: accuracy was a major problem in the classroom even when we were spending 100% of the time on writing and reading.

A high level of proficiency in written language should not be defined purely in terms of accuracy: the ability to express oneself in writing needs to be emphasized. Hans-Eberhard Piepho in Dublin last week reminded us that batteries of grammatical exercises are not the key to a high level of written proficiency for the vast majority of learners. They pay off only for a small number of students who are natural rule-learners. Research has found that reading has a far greater contribution to make to improving the standard of written production.

Materials in which all four skills - reading, writing, listening and speaking - are integrated and interdependent have a better chance of producing good writing than writing exercises in isolation. Working with students on discovering the pattern in their own errors is also helpful. Stephen Krashen's new book, Writing, is a slim volume full of useful ideas.

QUESTION 3

"Is literature a very important part of the course? If so, how is it best integrated into the present course? (Time seems to be the problem!) How does the panel feel it should be tested?"

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BILL RICHARDSON:

Literature is important and it can be successfully brought into the course if it is carefully selected to be relevant and appropriate to one's students. Literature covers such a wide range of materials that you can find something that will work for your students - perhaps a modern short story written simply but well. You can even pick examples which are very close to the spoken language.

Having selected pieces which are suitable, you can help students to understand what they are reading by a variety of methods: by summarizing the material beforehand, by various comprehension exercises, even by translation. Literature can also be used thematically in conjunction with projects on aspects of the culture and society whose language you are studying. In such cases the student uses the piece of literature as a source of information for her/his project.

On the question of examinations, one problem is that a tendency to too much "lit. crit." was followed by a swing towards a very banal type of questioning on event and plot, etc. What we need to do is to steer a middle course which would be much more interesting and more fruitful.

QUESTION 4

"Video and taperecorded materials sometimes induce passivity on the part of students. What preparatory or accompanying activities would the panel propose in order to combat this passive effect?"

NATUCCA CORDON:

Pupils should never attend a video session without paper and pencil: the short-term memory eventually disappears and very little is retained from just watching TV. In my classroom I use not only the video but also the OHP and photocopies. First I show the video, then I ask the pupils to jot down any vocabulary that they don't understand. Having gone through that, we play the video again and at that stage they understand most of the tape. I give any extra explanation or information in Spanish, introducing it gradually. In a first year class, I do it all in English, in a second year class I use some Spanish, and eventually in sixth year I do it all through Spanish. This can be a good way of reinforcing what has already been taught in the video tape. It is very useful to have a worksheet prepared on the video; you can use the photocopies of it with several classes if you have the pupils write their answers in their copies rather than on the sheets.

Sometimes I have found it useful to ask questions beforehand and then go over the vocabulary and let the pupils do the exercises by themselves. This is a good aural exercise. Sometimes I ask them to learn vocabulary, to fill in gaps in sentences I have already given them, or to tell what happened, and I always do a lot of exercises and games on certain patterns that I feel are of interest.

QUESTION 5

"How can one best cope with mixed-ability senior-cycle students, in a small school with no facility for two classes?"

BILL RICHARDSON:

Many modern language teachers in Ireland are faced with this difficult and demanding situation. Perhaps the most obvious strategy for coping with it is to aim a lot of what you do at the middle range of your class, necessarily sacrificing to a certain extent the attention you can give to the weaker and to the better people in the class.

Group-work is very useful because you can have groups which are each mixed-ability and in which each student has something to contribute at his/her own level - the weak can gain confidence and the stronger ones have an opportunity to shine.

NATUCCA CORDON:

I have a sixth year comprising very good honours students and also very poor pass-level ones, so I organize my week so that one day I pay attention to the pass students and one day to the honours students and on two other days to both groups together. In practical work sessions it is very important to give extra help and walk around the classroom, expecting the good ones to do very well and exacting a higher standard from them while getting the weaker students to perform well at a simpler level. Graded exercises are useful, as is graded praise, judiciously distributed. I find small-group work on dialogues and tapes very helpful.

QUESTION 6

"Perhaps you would kindly outline the arrangements, if any, that are being made to train teachers in the use of the proposed new methods and materials?"

37 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MARY VARILLY:

A lot has been done in this area. Arrangements are being made for in-service training by several bodies. The total amount of money available for in-service is not great, but the Department of Education has given modern language teaching a very high priority. There is an enormous amount of co-operation between all concerned. In the last few years, the subject associations, the cultural institutes, third-level people, second-level people, teachers generally, and other institutes like ITE, have got together and have really got things moving on training teachers. It should be borne in mind, however, that in Ireland, in-service is voluntary and we cannot force everyone to avail of it.

HELEN HARNETT:

I would like to congratulate the modern language inspectorate for having worked so hard to get us a big slice of the in-service budget. Nevertheless, the feedback from teachers would indicate that the present arrangements are hopelessly inadequate and haphazard, despite all the laudable attempts being made by the inspectors, the cultural institutes, the universities, the NIHEs and everyone else. The teachers feel that they need far more, and the FTA would like to see a national policy on in-service education for modern languages.

QUESTION 7

"If you have done well as a teacher under the old system, what skills do you have to develop to cope with the new approach, and what skills can be simply transferred?"

NATUCCA CORDON:

It is not necessary to throw out all your old skills. I think the first thing a person has to do to cope with the new approach is to do extensive research into materials. There are a great number of materials on the market, most of them very attractive but not all of them good. The old grammar skills can be integrated with the new materials. Old-style exercises, pattern-drills, etc. are very useful and stay in the memory, as do dialogues learned off by heart, which pupils often still know years after they have left school and use when speaking the foreign language abroad.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

QUESTION 8

"Does the panel feel that the new methods, materials and evaluation systems satisfy all pupils' needs? In particular, are the less able adequately catered for?"

ANNE CLARK:

No system can satisfy all needs, but the new system satisfies the needs of a far greater number of students. The good student will do well under any system, but with the communicative approach, the good student has the scope and freedom to achieve probably far more than he/she did under the old system. But it is with the less able student that the communicative approach shows its great strength. The weaker student under the old system had a very poor chance of success. A sense of failure was engendered right from the start, with a disastrous effect on motivation. The new system at least gives credit for the bit that is known.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE